God-Centered Worship

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Introduction

The Bible is a handbook on worship.

It first connects a person with Jesus Christ. That is, the Bible directs him to a saving relationship with God (lesson 9), and gives him the heart of a worshipper.

Then the Bible calls a person to worship with inspiring verses such as Psalm 95:6 and 96:9.

"O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker."

"O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth."

The Bible also testifies about the beauty and blessing of worship through people like David, which encourages the believer to join in!

"One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple" (Psalm 27:4).

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD" (Psalm 122:1).

The Bible also teaches the believer how to worship. That's the purpose of this student book. The great worship texts of the Bible, from the Old Testament altar to the New Testament church to the worship services of heaven, will be studied in an effort to learn how to exalt God in ways pleasing to Him. The goal of the study is not to advance personal preferences for worship, but God's prescriptions for worship.

And finally, the Bible proclaims that God is worthy of worship. Whatever the setting and regardless of the occasion, worship as God has instructed is always appropriate.

"From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD'S name is to be praised" (Psalm 113:3).

Worship at the Altar

Genesis 12:1-8; 13:1-4, 18

The hymn by Elisha Hoffman "Is Your All on the Altar?" reminds me of Abraham. The first stanza of that 1900 hymn reads, "You have longed for sweet peace, and for faith to increase, And have earnestly, fervently prayed; but you cannot have rest or be perfectly blest until all on the altar is laid."

That's what Abraham did. He built altars with which to worship God, laid the essence of his life upon those altars, and thereby found peace and rest. It was his unique way of worshipping God, and a way to which God favorably responded.

Abraham (father of a multitude), who was known in the lesson text as Abram (high father), was called by God. God graciously took the initiative in calling Abraham out of a pagan world and existence (Genesis 12:1), blessed him superabundantly (Genesis 13:2), and also promised to bless the entire world through him and his descendants (Genesis 12:2-3). The most critical and exciting of those descendants, of course, was Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:8, 14).

Abraham excelled when he immediately accepted God's call (Genesis 12:1, 4). He was seventy-five years old at the time, and his wife Sarah was sixty-five. They were settled and prosperous in their own land and had no personal inclination to leave. Yet when the call came, they obediently packed up and moved by faith as God directed them. *"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went"* (Hebrews 11:8).

Faith and obedience were not the only godly qualities that marked

The Heart of the Lesson

Abraham worshipped God by faith and in obedience. Worship in dedication, acknowledging the presence and goodness of God.

the life of Abraham. There was another outstanding virtue that naturally accompanied faith and obedience, and that was worship. Abraham intently worshipped God! He worshipped in dedication, acknowledging the presence and goodness of God, and thus became an example for us.

Abraham Was a Consistent Builder

Abraham wasn't the first Bible person to build an altar. Noah was (Genesis 8:20). Abraham, however, was a consistent altar builder. He constructed altars all along the path of the new life given him by God. He built one in Sichem (Genesis 12:6-7), one in Bethel (Genesis 12:8; 13:3-4), and one in Hebron (Genesis 13:18). That was his routine, but not a dull or dispirited one. He pitched his tent, then immediately built an altar for worship as the standard procedure of his life.

Altar building can be good or bad. Abraham's purpose in erecting altars was noble and godly, but there were other altars built in Bible times by pagans whose intent was neither noble or godly. Those altars are found in 1 Kings 16:32; 18:26; Isaiah 27:9; 65:3; Hosea 8:11, and there was even one altar in the New Testament built *"TO THE UNKNOWN GOD"* (Acts 17:23).

So altars can abound. Anyone, anywhere can construct an altar to anything at anytime. So more important than merely building an altar is what is done at the altar.

Abraham Was a True Worshipper of God

Abraham built the Sichem altar not for personal reasons, but because God had made His presence known to him and had promised to bless him. Genesis 12:7 twice says that *"the LORD appeared unto Abram,"* and pledged *"Unto thy seed will I give this land."*

Abraham felt that such a gracious visitation from God required a quick and earnest response. Consequently, he built the altar to submissively and humbly acknowledge the presence of God and to sincerely thank God for blessing him so abundantly.

Abraham built the Bethel altar on his first trip through the land (Genesis 12:8), and later returned to it (Genesis 13:3-4). On both occasions the verses say that he *"called upon the name of the LORD"* at the altar. That's worship!

Worship is doing whatever pleases and exalts God, which certainly qualifies prayer as an act of worship. The altar helped Abraham to keep the lines of communication open between himself and his Creator. It signaled that he was willing to hear, obey, and serve God, and it also served as a witness to all who saw him worshipping God at the altar.

We can safely assume that Abraham continued to acknowledge God's presence, to thank Him, and pray to Him at all three altars; and he most likely worshipped Him in other ways at the altars as well.

Old Testament people, for example, built altars as a place to renew their spiritual lives and to confess their sins and make sacrifices for them (Genesis 8:20). Abraham, as an imperfect person, would need to do the same. At the point of Genesis 12-13, he had made at least one mistake in relation to Lot, his nephew, and one mistake in relation to Sarah, his wife. So he was not without error. He would need to seek forgiveness and make matters right with God just like all other people, and the Old Testament altar was the customary place to take such action.

By his altar building Abraham admitted that he was not a faultless servant of God, just a humble and available one. Therefore, God accepted Abraham's worship and providentially used him to move the course of the world toward His divine will and the birth of His divine Son.

So Abraham's worship at the altar was genuine. It pleased God, and was approved by Him, and consequently has become a defining influence on worship today. By Abraham's worship we learn that:

- Worship is acknowledging the presence of God.
- Worship is praying to God.
- Worship is thanking God.
- Worship is keeping the lines of communication open with God.
- Worship is confessing sins before God.
- Worship is making ourselves available to God.

Altar building is not the key. Even in Old Testament times God said *"For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings"* (Hosea 6:6).

No. God doesn't command us to build old-time altars today. That age has come and gone, and Christ has ushered in a new and better way. The essence of worship as offered by Abraham at the altar is still pleasing to God, but that is best given today as the *"living sacrifice"* described by Paul in Romans 12:1-2: *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."*

As a purposeful act of worship, *"present"* yourself to God in the full strength of Romans 12:1-2, and your worship will be as meaningful and acceptable to God as the worship of Abraham at the altar.

2 Worship With a View to Obey

Exodus 34:1-9

Worship without obedience to God is a mockery. It is irreligious and illogical. The two are interdependent. Worship without obedience is not truly worship, and obedience without worship is not truly obedience. To have one, you must have the other.

Such was the worship of Moses in Exodus 34. The fact that he worshipped is clear in verse 8, *"Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped."* His obedience was equally clear from the standpoint that he was on Mount Sinai as instructed by God (verse 4) to receive the Ten Commandments.

Moses, in reaction to the sins of the Israelites (Exodus 32:19), broke the first two tablets on which the Law was engraved by God. Then, in Exodus 34:1-9, Moses returned to Mount Sinai for another forty days (Exodus 34:28) to again receive the Law, and it was in that setting that he worshipped God with the full intention of obeying Him.

Moses did not worship God with the aid of a modern building, a massive congregation, or a musical presentation. He did, however, worship God with a view to obey the Ten Commandments, and God responded very favorably and decisively. Notice the favor and decisiveness in Exodus 34:10 and also the importance of obedience as it is once again stated in the first clause of Exodus 34:11: *"He* [God] *said, Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the* LORD: *for it*

The Heart of the Lesson

Moses obeyed God and made his worship of God meaningful, therefore, worship in full commitment to obeying God.

is a terrible [awesome] *thing that I will do with thee. Observe thou that which I command thee this day."*

Moses, in Exodus 34:8, worshipped God spontaneously *("Moses made haste")* and humbly *("bowed his head toward the earth")*. But the strongest point was that he worshipped God with an obedient heart in response to God giving him the Ten Commandments. While worshipping God, Moses accepted the Ten Commandments and submitted himself to obeying them, according to the record of Exodus 34:1-9.

The lesson comments will examine the text in reverse. The circumstances surrounding Moses' receiving the Law on this occasion moved him to worship.

A Request for the People (Exodus 34:8-9)

The disobedience of God's people greatly bothered Moses. He knew that they had done wrong in making the golden calf and in so terribly breaking the Ten Commandments before they had even received them. God had been good to His people in delivering them from Egypt and in supplying their daily needs, and Moses disliked the idea of the Israelites repaying Him with gross disobedience. Therefore, as a representative of the people, Moses respectfully pleaded with God to forgive them of their sins and to renew His covenant with them.

The covenant, which was strictly based on God's willingness to forgive His people and their renewed obedience to His Word, was restored in Exodus 34:10-35.

A Recognition of God's Attributes (Exodus 34:6-7)

Moses had good reason to worship and obey God.

First, God was (is) an awesome God. In verses 6-7 God *"proclaimed"* six astounding attributes about Himself. He revealed to Moses that He was (1) *"merciful,"* (2) *"gracious,"* (3) *"longsuffering"* or patient, (4) *"abundant in goodness,"* (5) *"abundant in ... truth,"* and (6) *"forgiving."* Why then would the Israelites want to be loyal to a lesser god? Why would they not want to worship and obey such a wonderful and true God? Yes! Moses had good reason to give himself totally and exclusively to *"The LORD, The LORD God"* (verse 6).

Second, God's plan for mankind, which was concisely stated in the Ten Commandments, would lead to prosperity and to a long, happy, and harmonious life with other people. To disobey the Ten Commandments would bring about punishment and cause their children and grandchildren to needlessly suffer (verse 7).

Anything less than worshipping and obeying God was not only irreligious to Moses, but also illogical.

A Response to God's Presence (Exodus 34:5)

"*The LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there*" (verse 5), and it was in that scenario that Moses so humbly worshipped God (verse 8). Moses could not have endured the full impact of God's presence (Exodus 33:18-23), but he was at least aware of a form of God's presence and His glorious attributes, and that had a remarkable affect on Moses. "*It came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him*" (Exodus 34:29).

Being in the presence of God, which God initiates and is universal (Psalm 139:8; Proverbs 15:3), is incentive for everyone everywhere to worship God in absolute obedience.

A Recommitment to Obedience (Exodus 34:1-4)

All that happened in the text began when Moses obeyed God. He followed God's instructions by preparing two new tablets and taking them by himself to Mount Sinai to receive the Law, and he did so with the full intention of consistently obeying every detail of God's law. Therefore, when Moses worshipped God in verse 8, God accepted his worship as genuine, and Moses was truly blessed by the worship experience. That's the way worship works! It is a unique mix of obedience and praise. Take the praise away, and the obedience is meaningless. Take the obedience away, and the praise is meaningless.

It is good to have the Ten Commandments hanging on the walls of public buildings such as schools, and county, state, and federal buildings. It is better to have the Ten Commandments hanging on the walls of our church buildings and homes. It is, however, best to have the Ten Commandments in our hearts and minds to guide us in our daily walk. It is when God's Word actually governs our every attitude and action that worship takes on a deep meaning and becomes a powerful force in exalting God and blessing people.

So worship God regularly and always with a view to obey!

Worship and the Ten Commandments

If loving God is worship, and surely it is, then obeying God is worship. For the two are connected. Jesus said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments"* (John 14:15).

Loving and obeying God may not constitute a traditional worship service, but both truly are personal acts of worship. Therefore, when God gives us a concise list of commands such as He has done in the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20, we should do all within our ability to learn and practice them.

Here is an easy way to memorize the Ten Commandments.

The first four commandments govern our relationship with God. That's definitely our most important relationship. The first four commandments also appear to be ranked in an order of importance.

1. *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."*
2. *"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image."*
3. *"Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain."*
4. *"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy."*

The fifth commandment governs our relationships at home, which is next in importance to our relationship with God.

5. *"Honour thy father and thy mother."*

The last five commandments, which also appear to be ranked in their individual order of importance, govern our relationships with other people.

6. *"Thou shalt not kill."*
7. *"Thou shalt not commit adultery."*
8. *"Thou shalt not steal."*
9. *"Thou shalt not bear false witness."*
10. *"Thou shalt not covet."*

Become familiar with each commandment, and then remember them in their rank and order of importance. Visualize them in their groups, and recite them several times over for a few consecutive days. Soon you will be able to recite all ten from memory.

And then, as a personal act of devotion to God, practice them in your daily life. As James said, *"Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves"* (James 1:22). For worship without obedience would surely be an act of deception!

3

Worship Expressed in Giving

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Giving is worship in action. It is not all that worship is, but it is a very meaningful expression of worship, and one for which God gives specific instructions in Deuteronomy 26:1-11.

Deuteronomy was a "second law giving" in that Moses repeated to a new generation much of what he had already taught the Israelites in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. His purpose was to prepare the new generation to take possession of the Promised Land. If they disobeyed God, their new land would be without promise. If they obeyed God, however, Canaan would be a land of peace, prosperity, and plenty.

In the lesson text Moses repeated the law of the *"firstfruits"* which was originally given in Leviticus 23:9-14, and in verse 10 of the text he identified giving as an act of worship. *"And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O LORD, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the LORD thy God, and worship before the LORD thy God."*

Deuteronomy, and its law associating giving and worship, imposes nothing upon New Testament Christians as far as the letter of the law is concerned. It does, however, offer today's believers something as far as the spirit of the law is concerned. It is a prescription for worship as given early on by God, and one that teaches us to faithfully give our first and best to God.

The Heart of the Lesson

God instructed His people to give as an act of worship and devotion. Worship by freely giving your first and best to God.

Give as One Blessed by God (Deuteronomy 26:1)

Notice the words in verse 1 that read *"when thou art come in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee."* The word *"thou"* refers to all of God's people. All of them were bound for the Promised Land. All of them would be showered with the blessings of God. All of them would enjoy an abundant land freely given them through the goodness of God. All of them, therefore, were to worship God by giving to Him in return, as God gave them *"ability"* (Ezra 2:69).

If they failed to give they would be ill-prepared to enter into a land flowing with milk and honey, and their experience in Canaan would tragically become a story of greed and selfishness. By refusing to give they would destroy the essence of their worship and become perverted *takers* rather than the *givers* God intended them to be.

So everyone who has the ability to make income should give, and that giving should be done worshipfully.

Give at the Central Sanctuary (Deuteronomy 26:2)

Because giving was an act of worship, Moses taught the Israelites to give at the place where *"God shall choose"* (verse 2). The preference about the place of giving was not theirs, but God's. They were to give at the place where the priest was present (Deuteronomy 26:3), where they could come respectfully before God (Deuteronomy 26:4-5) and formally give their firstfruits. *"Thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name there"* (verse 2).

This practice of giving at a designated place continued throughout the Old Testament (Malachi 3:10), and into the New Testament (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). And so it goes today. On the Lord's day we gather with the Lord's people, and together we give as the Lord has prospered us (1 Corinthians 16:2). We do not give because we are a great people who should be praised for giving, but because God is a great God to Whom we owe absolutely everything! As King David said in a grand moment of formal worship, *"Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.... But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.... O LORD our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own"* (1 Chronicles 29:12, 14, 16).

Give as a Public Testimony to Declare the Goodness of God (Deuteronomy 26:9)

Never should God's people give simply to be seen by other people (Matthew 6:1-4). That's totally wrong. However, neither should we be so secretive in our giving that God doesn't receive glory.

God had corporately, openly, and abundantly blessed the Israelites (verse 9) and then instructed them to respond in like manner by openly giving their firstfruits in return. Why? It was not for show. It was not for them to make a name for themselves as big givers. But it was for God's glory. It was a public testimony to declare before all the world that God's goodness was unsurpassed. They came together in the worship of God, and they gave together in praise to God for all that He had done for them by His grace.

Flaunting the act of giving or your gift in a public worship service is not right, but it is right to give publicly as a witness to God's goodness. Your purpose and attitude in giving, therefore, is critical.

Give to God Your First and Best (Deuteronomy 26:10)

Someone asked, "Am I giving what is right or what is left?" Only our actions can fully answer that question. However, the Bible clearly teaches us what we should do. God forthrightly teaches us to give the firstfruits of our income, and to do so willingly.

In David's worship service mentioned above, these words were spoken about the offerings being given to build the temple. *"Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy"* (1 Chronicles 29:9).

Their willingness to give sounds like the cheerful giving of 2 Corinthians 9:7, and it was definitely an act of worship since they also attributed *"greatness," "power," "glory," "victory,"* and *"majesty"* to God (1 Chronicles 29:11). And not only did they give willingly, but in giving their firstfruits (verse 10) they also gave their first, best, and most desirable to God.

Thus the standard for giving to God was set, and the word *"firstfruits"* went on to be mentioned at least thirty-three more times in the Old and New Testaments.

Worship is a verb, and one of the purest forms of worship is giving. Give as God enables you. Give as God instructs you. Give in worship. Give as a witness to God's goodness, and always give your first and best to God. For that's true worship.

4 Worship Reverently

Joshua 5:13-15

Reverence is the heart of worship. Giving in worship can be generous. Praise in worship can be high sounding. The music and messages of worship can be soul stirring, and all other aspects of worship can appear to be healthy as well. However, if there is no genuine reverence before God, then the whole beat of worship is off. It's out of tune and not in rhythm according to the Scriptures.

If a soldier failed to snap to attention at the sight of our national flag, we would consider him to be insubordinate and unpatriotic. If a juror refused to stand as a judge entered the courtroom, we would consider him to be disrespectful. If a teenager were to be rude to a senior citizen, we would consider him to be spoiled and undisciplined. If a motorist were to purposefully disobey the directions of a policeman, we would consider him to be irresponsible and rebellious. In all these cases we know undoubtedly that respect is due to the authority figure. How much more should we show that respect as Christians who worship before God. He is absolutely worthy of respect. He is worthy of awe. He is worthy of reverence. As the Psalmist said, *"Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him"* (Psalm 33:8).

Joshua, in the lesson text (Joshua 5:13-15), worshipped in the Lord's presence on the eve of the battle against Jericho. He worshipped Jesus Who made a pre-incarnate appearance (called a Christophany) as *"captain of the host of the LORD,"* and he worshipped reverently as he *"fell on his face to the earth"* (Joshua 5:14). In reading the full text we can learn that this single act of worship prepared

The Heart of the Lesson

Joshua worshipped God in reverence and was blessed. Worship in an attitude of complete reverence and submission to God.

Joshua to fight victoriously in God's strength and for His glory.

"It came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the LORD'S host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so" (Joshua 5:13-15).

Revere the Lord's Presence

Joshua, though he was the powerful and exalted leader of the Israelites, *"fell on his face to the earth"* before the Lord, and he did so immediately and without question. That was a sign of humility and submission, and it also indicated that Joshua revered the Lord. He knew instantly that the presence of God demanded respect.

Joshua had been *"magnified"* by God (Joshua 4:14). The people of Israel *"feared him"* (Joshua 4:14), and God had even given Joshua permission to *"command"* (Joshua 4:16) the people. Yet in verse 14 of the text Joshua called himself a *"servant."* He was the high commander of Israel, but a lowly servant before God, and he indicated it by both his attitude and actions.

Joshua obediently respected the Lord, and the Lord rightfully called for the respect. The pre-incarnate Christ said in verse 15, *"Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy."* And Joshua did exactly as he was told. Joshua realized that he was in a worship service, a timely and unique worship service before a holy and awesome God.

Joshua's experience was also the experience of Moses, his predecessor. He too, on the occasion of his call into the ministry at the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-22), was told to *"put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground"* (Exodus 3:5).

Moses, like Joshua, was awed by God's presence. He *"hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God,"* says Exodus 3:6. So both Moses and Joshua respected God, and both were blessed thereby. Moses, through his reverent worship experience, realized that God was still God (Exodus 3:6), that God was good (Exodus 3:7), and that God was worthy of service (Exodus 3:10). And Joshua, after falling reverently at the feet of the Lord, was prepared for battle against an enemy of superior strength. Therefore, it was to his advantage to worship reverently before the Lord, as it is to our advantage today.

There is a time to be relaxed before God, and there may even be a time to be casual. The foundation of those times, however, should very strictly be one of awe, fear, and trembling. It is not important that we take off our shoes, but it is important that we respect God according to the norms of our day. For God alone is the Creator, and we are His creations.

Reverence Demonstrates Who Is in Charge

Joshua, in Joshua 5, did not get in the Lord's face, but he *"fell on his face to the earth"* before the Lord. Neither did Moses in Exodus 3, but he *"hid his face"* before the Lord. So it is not surprising that these two men, in connection with their reverent times of worship, had life-changing experiences. Thereafter, Moses took his first step in preparing to lead the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, and Joshua took his final step before leading God's army in battle against Jericho.

When Jesus appeared to Joshua in Gilgal, He correctly called Himself the *"captain"* (verse 14). That settled the issue for Joshua, and relieved him as well. He was not in charge, nor did he have the worries of one who was; the Lord was in charge!

Furthermore, Joshua asked the Lord, *"Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?"* (verse 13). In essence, Jesus said "neither." The word *"nay"* in verse 14 meant that the Lord was not going to fight on Joshua's side, but that Joshua was going to fight on His side. It meant that God was not going to be somewhere in the background, but leading in the battle.

Joshua got the message. He understood what the Lord was saying; it comforted him, and it was not by happenstance that he understood it during worship.

If we don't reverence God in worship, we may very well forget Who is in charge. In our fun and frivolity we may miss extremely important messages such as those written by Paul about Jesus in Ephesians 1:21-23, in which he said that Jesus is *"Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."*

Reverence Brings Reassurance

Joshua's life was dramatically changed and improved as he worshipped respectfully before the Lord, and it definitely helped him to know that he did not have to bear the burden of the battle alone. The

"captain" had *"come"* to the battle scene (verse 14). His words, and the words of Joshua, were few, but the Lord's presence was astounding, and, consequently, all would be well. Joshua discovered that blessed truth in worship, and, like Joshua, only in worship will today's believers be able to firmly connect with the great and comforting promises of Jesus — promises like the one found in Matthew 11:28, *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*

Furthermore, it was in worship that Joshua made the all-out commitment to trust God on the eve of the battle against Jericho. Just crossing the Jordan River was not enough (Joshua 3). Just consecrating the people was not enough (Joshua 4). Just celebrating the Passover was not enough (Joshua 5). Joshua needed to be in the intimate presence of the Commander and personally worship Him before he could ably lead in battle. Reverent worship was that important to Joshua, and it is that important to us as well. As someone said, "When the remembrance of God lives in the heart and there maintains the fear of Him, then all goes well; but when this remembrance grows weak or is kept only in the head, then all goes astray."

Is "the captain of the LORD'S host" with believers today? Yes! Jesus came to be "God with us" in Matthew 1:23, promised to be with us "unto the end of the world" in Matthew 28:20, and told us how in John 14:16-18: "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."

Should today's believers revere the Lord's presence? Yes! Just as Joshua removed his shoes out of respect to God, we should respect God in worship. Whether it is to stand in His presence as a worship service begins, or to sit quietly to hear the proclaiming of His Word as a worship service proceeds, or to kneel before Him in the altar as a worship service concludes, reverence before God is always appropriate, and even imperative. In private or public worship, reverence is the heart of worship.

Worship Expressed by Thanksgiving

1 Chronicles 16:1-4, 7-13, 29, 34

The Psalms are filled with thanksgiving. Twenty-two times the word *thanks* appears in the book, one time the word *thankful* appears, and eight times the word *thanksgiving* is used. The thanksgiving of the Psalms is also deeply felt, and most often expressed as a genuine act of worship.

Here is a sampling. *"Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High"* (Psalm 50:14). *"It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High"* (Psalm 92:1). *"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name"* (Psalm 100:4). *"Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing"* (Psalm 107:22). *"Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name: the upright shall dwell in thy presence"* (Psalm 140:13).

The last verse was written by David. He could not imagine a worshipper, a truly *"righteous"* person, being in God's presence without a grateful heart. He would see that as a contradiction, as something that could not and should not happen in worship. And he was right! For God desires that we be humbly and openly thankful to Him and before Him in worship.

David practiced what he preached in Psalm 140:13. On the occasion of an actual worship service in Jerusalem which is recorded in

The Heart of the Lesson

David led God's people to worship with grateful hearts. Worship by expressing heartfelt gratitude to God.

1 Chronicles 16, David led the people of Israel in offering exuberant thanksgiving to God.

The ark of the covenant at the time was in Obededom (1 Chronicles 15:25), and David wanted to honor God by bringing it to Jerusalem. So he built a place for the ark, a temporary worship center (1 Chronicles 15:1), and set out to bring it to the holy city (1 Chronicles 15:3). As they drew near Jerusalem with the ark, a great celebration broke out (1 Chronicles 15:28), and arrangements for a countrywide worship service were made. Though their worship had many features, nothing was stressed more than thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving Marks the Assembly of God's People

The people were called to worship, and the service officially began in 1 Chronicles 16:1. It happened, much like our worship today, in a specified place by the whole assembly of God's people. Offerings and sacrifices were made, and then the worship leaders led the Israelites *"to thank and praise the LORD God of Israel"* (1 Chronicles 16:4).

Thanksgiving and praise were crucial to the worship service. They could not truly praise God without genuinely thanking Him, and they could not thank God without praising Him. The two went naturally together. And God fully deserved it! He had given them a land of safety, a time of prosperity, and a covenant of gracious promises symbolized by the ark of the covenant. They had good reason to be thankful. They were thankful. And they expressed their thankfulness in worship.

Thanksgiving was appropriate for that day, and it is appropriate when believers gather in our day. *"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Ephesians 5:20). *"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God"* (Philippians 4:6). *"Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him"* (Colossians 3:17). *"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you"* (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Thanksgiving Witnesses to the World

Does the world see God's people complaining more, or expressing appreciation and gratitude more? Do we speak more about what we don't have, or more about what we do have? Do we pity ourselves more, or do we praise God for His blessings more? That's a serious issue. It's one that definitely affects our witness to the world, and one

that David considered in 1 Chronicles 16:8. *"Give thanks unto the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people."*

If we fail to thank God during our times of private and public worship, we are either saying that God hasn't done much, or that we haven't recognized much of what God has done. And neither option is a good witness to the world! For that matter, it is an extremely poor testimony. Therefore, we need to take a lesson from David in paying thanks to the Lord, and from the Psalmist of Psalm 107:1-2 as well. *"O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy."*

Thanksgiving Should Be Proactive

Have you noticed the word *"give"* in the text? It's found in verse 8, *"give thanks unto the LORD,"* and also in verses 28 and 29.

Give is an action word, and in this setting it also implies a voluntary and full giving. It was not coerced. David did not pressure the Israelites into giving thanks, nor did he threaten them if they didn't. It was of their free will and pro-active.

Forced thanksgiving is not true thanksgiving. It's not true for the spoiled child who is forced to give thanks before he gets a piece of candy, or for the ungrateful adult who expresses gratitude only to get his way, or for the worshipper who would really rather not be sitting in a pew and singing "praise God from whom all blessings flow."

Thanksgiving is a matter of the heart, one that moves the mind and will to freely express gratitude to God. It's a beautiful trait in an individual's personality. It indicates humility, a wholesome relationship with God, and an awareness of the wonderful things that God is doing in a person's life.

So give thanks, and be extremely glad that you have something for which to be thankful!

Thanksgiving Indicates a Spirit of Joy

It's not surprising that the gratitude which was freely expressed was also offered in a spirit and atmosphere of rejoicing. The more they offered thanks, the happier they became. And the happier they became, the more they offered thanks. It was an elevating experience, and one that grew in intensity according to 1 Chronicles 16:9-11. *"Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD. Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually."*

Try offering thanks. Do it sincerely, consistently, and joyfully and worship services will become more meaningful and lively. People will

be happier about their participation in the services, and they will leave with greater joy and hope and be more apt to return.

Thanksgiving works! It works for the One being worshipped, and for the ones worshipping.

Thanksgiving Is Due

David and the people of Israel did not praise God in gratitude because they were so good, but because God was so great!

They offered thanks because of God's *"marvellous works." "Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth"* (1 Chronicles 16:12).

They also offered thanks because it was *"due." "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness"* (1 Chronicles 16:29).

They offered thanks because God was *"good." "O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever"* (1 Chronicles 16:34).

The country may have changed from Israel to America, the place from the temporary tent to the church building, and the occasion from housing the ark of the covenant to the typical Sunday worship service, but God has not changed. God is still good, and His works today are as marvelous as ever before, especially those involving Jesus Christ and His eternal gift of salvation. Therefore, thanksgiving is as much due to God today as at any point and time in history.

Thanksgiving was due to God long ago (1 Chronicles 16), thanksgiving is due to God today (Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:18), and thanksgiving will be due and given to God in the future and beyond according to Revelation 7:9, 12.

"This I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;... Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen."

The worship of 1 Chronicles 16 and Revelation 7, and all the texts in between, is the worship God desires. It's the worship He prescribes and accepts, and the worship which ultimately blesses the worshipper. Therefore, whether you are worshipping by yourself, with your family at home, or with your local congregation at church, always remember to give thanks. Recall God's marvelous works in your life, humble yourself before Him, and offer gratitude in genuine, glad, and glorious praise.

Worship Gloriously

2 Chronicles 7:1-3

I agree. The church building does not have to be large and luxurious to be a place of worship. Nor do the pews need to be padded, the sound system to be high-tech, the organ to be high-sounding, the air system to be perfectly set on seventy-two degrees, or the worship style to be contemporary to be accepted to God. A believer can worship God anywhere at anytime. There's no doubt, for example, that Jonah worshipped God in the belly of a great fish, that Daniel worshipped God in a lion's den, and that Paul worshipped God in a prison cell. So no, worship does not have to be on a grand scale to be pleasing to God and beneficial to the worshipper. For that matter, the grandeur, if we are not careful, can be a distraction from worship.

We also have to be careful not to go to the other extreme. That is, if God gives us the means to worship Him on a grand scale and to make the worship services glorious, and we fail to do so out of a spirit of false humility, laziness, spiritual ignorance, or personal preference, that's not good either. Remember that worship isn't primarily for us; it's for God, and we should worship Him to the very best of our ability and means.

That's the lesson of 2 Chronicles 7:1-3, which is the record of King Solomon leading the people of Israel in dedicating the newly built temple in Jerusalem.

King David, Solomon's father, was prohibited by God from building the temple because he was a man of war. God, however, did allow David to gather the necessary building materials, and David did just that with great effort and style. *"The work is great: for the palace is*

The Heart of the Lesson

Solomon worshipped gloriously and witnessed the glory of God in worship. Worship by attributing glory to God.

not for man, but for the LORD God. Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God" (1 Chronicles 29:1-2)

That was David's attitude toward the total building project, and the people followed his lead according to 1 Chronicles 29:9. *"Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy."*

So David and the Israelites came before God with the best building and worship plan possible, which was also one directed and approved by God (1 Chronicles 29:16). They gave their best materials and efforts to work the plan as far as they could, and in the meanwhile they worshipped God to the best of their ability (1 Chronicles 29:10-13).

Then Solomon appeared on the scene to complete his father's work. He got underway in 2 Chronicles 2:1, finished in 5:1, and reached the apex of the temple dedication service in 7:1. It was a grand building and a spectacular time of worship, and most importantly it was an occasion to which God responded favorably!

God's Glory Is Seen by a Prepared People

God's people came together in sweet harmony for the dedication of the temple. As the ark of the covenant was installed in its new place, a well organized and unified worship service of music, praise, and thanksgiving commenced. Then God, in no uncertain terms, indicated His pleasure with the service and revealed His glory. *"It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God"* (2 Chronicles 5:13-14).

The people were not only unified in purpose, they were also unified in prayer. As the dedication service continued, Solomon fervently prayed and once again God revealed His glorious presence and power to the worshippers. *"Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house"* (2 Chronicles 7:1).

God's Glory Is Seen by a Responsive People

The day was special. The building was outstanding. The worship was majestic, and God made His presence known in such an as-

tounding way that no one could deny that He was an awesome God. *"The priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD'S house. And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever"* (2 Chronicles 7:2-3).

What a spectacular worship service! Though it was man's best building effort, no one said anything about the building. Though it was man's best worship effort, no one said anything about Solomon, the priests, or the music. Instead, their eyes and hearts were fixed on God, and everyone humbly exclaimed that God was good (verse 3)!

That's the way worship is supposed to work. We take the means which God graciously gives us, humble or great, and build the best building possible. We also offer to God our best worship effort: one that is organized, unified, and spiritual. In addition we pray to be keenly aware of God's presence in worship, to glorify Him, and to become more like Him in moral character and actions. Then we leave, not to brag on the building, congregation, ministers, choir, musicians, or music, but to praise God and to live for Him in the outside world. God responds to this kind of worship, and we are benefited as well.

We will not see God's glory by our own design or because of our personal worth. Seeing His glory is not a trivial pursuit or an experience to be turned on and off as you would a light switch. Neither will we see God's glory by happenstance or accident, nor by manipulative procedures, and certainly not through sinful methods. We will see God's glory when we are sincerely and spiritually prepared, when He chooses, and when He knows that we will be responsive to Him. That's the teaching of 2 Chronicles 7:1-3, and it holds true today. God does not mean for us to reproduce that exact worship building and service, but He does desire that we attribute glory to Him, and seek His glory through Christian worship. *"Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God"* (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Worship and the Word

Nehemiah 8:1-12

God's Word is central in worship. It was central in the worship service led by Nehemiah and Ezra in Nehemiah 8, and it is to be central in our worship today. That is, the Bible is to be the key guide in leading worshippers into the presence of God. Worship traditions and preferences, therefore, are to be secondary and followed only as they are based upon the Scripture. Otherwise, we could easily be led down the wrong worship path.

The worship service of Nehemiah 8 was pleasing to God and a powerful experience for the people. Nehemiah, at the time, had already led the Israelites in rebuilding the Jerusalem wall (Nehemiah 1-6) which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 586 B.C. They completed the wall in 445 B.C., just forty-five years before the four hundred silent years that led to the birth of Christ, and consequently it was time to reestablish the people as a nation and rededicate them to God (Nehemiah 7-13). And if all of this was to be done correctly, the people would also have to be re-instructed in God's Word. If not, their worship would not be authentic and the world would also be ill-prepared for the incarnation of Christ.

Nehemiah reached to the greater calling of guiding people in the ways and Word of God. The wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the sixth month (Nehemiah 6:15), and the worship service began on the first day of the seventh month (Nehemiah 8:2). The time was right, and the place was also right in that they met *"before the water gate"* (Nehemiah 8:1), which symbolized the Word of God and was the only gate of Nehemiah 3 which needed no repairs.

The Heart of the Lesson

Nehemiah led the Israelites to worship God based on the truth of His Word. Worship God in respect to His Word as your guide.

The Leaders' Responsibility to the Word

The re-instruction of God's people, which was coupled with worship (Nehemiah 8:6), was primarily led by Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor. Both men were used by God to bring about this great awakening of scriptural truth, and it wasn't by accident that God used them. Ezra, Nehemiah, and others (Nehemiah 8:7) were called to this task because their hearts were right with God and because they appreciated His Word. *"Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments"* (Ezra 7:10).

Their hearts were prepared to lead in the revival of God's Word, and according to Nehemiah 8:8, their messages were thoroughly prepared as well. *"They read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."*

The bricklayers didn't do sloppy work in rebuilding the Jerusalem wall, and neither did the teachers in sharing God's truth. They made the message clear *("distinctly")*, meaningful *("gave the sense")*, and understandable. The words *understanding, understand,* and *understood* appear six times in Nehemiah 8.

The Jews who had returned from Babylon were not familiar with Jewish customs and teachings, nor were they intimately acquainted with God's Word. So Nehemiah, Ezra, and their fellow teachers had to be as precise in rebuilding God's people in the Word as the workers had been in rebuilding the wall. Each building stone, physical or spiritual, was important. Consequently, with great care and lesson by lesson, the teachers rebuilt Israel as a nation and prepared them to play a significant role in the birth of Christ.

Today's worship leaders have the same responsibility. God's Word still is to be central in the worship service, and the messages are to be clear, meaningful, and understandable. It is from a prepared heart, and with great care and preciseness, that God's Word is to be delivered in a present-day worship service.

The People's Responsibility to the Word

The leaders weren't the only ones with worship responsibilities. The lay people of Israel had them as well.

They assembled in harmony. They were eager to hear the Word. Verse 1 of the text says that they *"gathered themselves together as one man,"* and Ezra was asked *"to bring the book of the law of Moses."* They were present to encourage one another and enthusiastic about hearing God's Word. That sounds much like the exhortation given to New Testament believers in Hebrews 10:24-25. *"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the as-*

sembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

They were attentive to the Word. Ezra read God's Word *"before the water gate from the morning until midday,... and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law"* (Nehemiah 8:3). They read God's Word five to six hours per day for a week, and the people never lost interest. How wonderful!

A sermon can be boring. I've preached some, and I've heard some preached. But it's not always the fault of the speaker. Sometimes it's the hearer. It may be a matter that someone has stayed up too late on Saturday night, or has come to the worship service ill-prepared physically, emotionally, or spiritually. That shouldn't happen! God's Word deserves attentive ears.

They respected God's Word. The Word was magnified by the reader standing on a platform, and by the people standing as the Word was read (Nehemiah 8:4-5).

There is a time in worship to stand respectfully for a Bible reading, and there is equally a time to sit quietly and reverently to hear the Word read as a student. Both examples, standing and sitting, are found in the Bible. The important issue, regardless of the posture, is to respect God's Word.

They responded to God's Word. *"Amen, Amen,"* which means "so be it," was the cry of the people as *"the book"* was read (Nehemiah 8:5-6). Worship is an action word. It prompts a response. From saying "Amen" to the proclaiming of God's truth, to departing from a service to live His truth, it's good when God's people react in a way pleasing to God.

They worshipped God and made decisions based on His Word (Nehemiah 8:6-12). They didn't worship the Word, but they worshipped God as they were moved by the Word. *"Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground"* (Nehemiah 8:6).

Nehemiah 8 was a Bible conference in that God's Word was central and that great respect and attention was given to His Word by the leaders and lay people. Also, it was a worship service in that God was worshipped rather than His Word. Finally, it was a convention in that the people made decisions based on His Word. They didn't come just to hear, but to follow the instructions given them in the writings of Moses. It resulted in God being exalted and the lives of the people being dramatically improved. Plus, it prepared the way for the birth of Christ and gave us a model for worship today.

Christ Worship

Matthew 2:1-12

Is it right to worship Christ, or is worship reserved only for God the Father? You don't have to read very far into the New Testament to find a definite answer to that question. Matthew 2:2, referring to Christ, states that the wise men came to Bethlehem *"to worship him,"* and Matthew 2:11 states that their objective was accomplished when they *"fell down, and worshipped him."*

Our lessons in this series should have removed any doubt that worshipping God the Father is an awesome responsibility and a top priority. Jesus Himself said at His temptation recorded in Matthew 4, *"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve"* (verse 10). Jesus' reference was clearly to God the Father, and He allowed Satan no slack in giving adoration and devotion to any other. Yet Jesus and the Father are one (John 10:30), and upon that basis Jesus deserves the glory due to deity. That's the truth taught by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:16. *"Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."*

Therefore, it is absolutely right to worship Christ, and that's why there are so many accounts of people worshipping Him in the New Testament. The first account was that of the wise men.

The Wise Men Worshipped Jesus

Worshipping the Christ child is the theme of Matthew 2:1-12. The word *worship* appears twice in the text, and the word *worshipped* appears once.

The Heart of the Lesson

God the Father is honored when God the Son is worshipped. Worship in adoration of God the Son.

One person in the story, however, had no intention of offering genuine worship to Christ. His name was Herod, and his motives were dark and deceptive. He was insincere and self-serving when he said to the wise men *"Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also"* (verse 8).

The words *go, search, diligently,* and *worship* were all wonderful sounding words, but they were spoken by an evil and paranoid person. They were spoken hypocritically by Herod the Great, the very man who had the children of Bethlehem executed (Matthew 2:16) in his quest to murder Jesus, Whom he saw as a rival.

The intentions of the wise men, however, were as good as Herod's were bad. Herod was motivated by evil desires, while the wise men were inspired by godly dedication. So it's not surprising that at the end of the story God, Who was apparently honored by their worship (Matthew 2:2, 11), protected the wise men from being harmed by Herod (Matthew 2:12).

No one knows who the wise men were, exactly how many there were (tradition says three), or where they came from other than the east. It is known, however, that they made a long-distance, sacrificial, and risky journey to pay homage to the One Who was *"born King of the Jews,"* and that God was behind their efforts as He gave them safe passage and sure guidance through a special star (Matthew 2:2).

It is also known that their worship was authentic and meaningful. The word *worship* in verse 2 means "to pay homage to," "to reverence," "to kiss toward," and "to bow down to." And not only were their actions right, but their attitudes were also right in that they were filled with joy over the prospect of finding the Christ Child. *"When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy"* (Matthew 2:10).

They came to worship Christ, the right person. They came with a pure motive. They came at a personal sacrifice. They came under God's guidance. They came in a spirit of joy, and they came to do what we were taught to do in lesson 3. They came to worship through giving. *"When they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh"* (Matthew 2:11).

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh may sound like strange gifts to give a baby boy. It's believed, however, that the gifts of the wise men funded the flight of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus into Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod (Matthew 2:13-15), and that's probably right.

Regardless of the gifts given, the important thing was that they gave, and that their giving was out of *"their treasures."* For Jesus in

later years would say, *"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"* (Matthew 6:21). Therefore, the worship of the wise men must have been a matter of the heart!

The Disciples Worshipped Jesus

The wise men were not the only New Testament people who worshipped Jesus. There were many others. For example, the disciples, as will be noted in lesson 10, worshipped Jesus spontaneously during His Galilean ministry (Matthew 14:32-33). Later, in Matthew 28:9, the women departing from the empty tomb of Jesus met Him along the way and the verse says that *"they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him."* And not only was the resurrected Savior worshipped, the ascended Savior was worshipped as well. The last recorded act of the disciples being with Jesus, as recorded in Luke 24:50-53, is one of a beautiful worship service directed to Him. *"He led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen."*

Notice in that last text how the worship of Christ was in perfect harmony with *"praising and blessing God."* You can't truly exalt Christ without exalting God; and you can't truly exalt God without exalting His Son! That's one reason why the disciples did not hesitate to worship Jesus.

The Heavenly Host Worship Jesus

Lesson 13 will focus on heavenly worship. Therefore, in this lesson, we'll peek into the future just enough to see that it is Jesus Who is worshipped on the throne in heaven. Jesus is not exalted to the neglect of God the Father in Revelation 4:1, 10-11, but to the glory and honor of the Father. *"After this I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven:... The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."*

Do you see the picture? Jesus was worshipped in the beginning of His earthly walk with mankind (Matthew 2:1-12). He was also worshipped as time progressed during his earthly ministry (Matthew 14:32-33), and He was worshipped as the resurrected Savior (Matthew 28:9) and the ascended Lord (Luke 24:50-53). He

was clearly worshipped in the past, and He will be more gloriously worshipped in the future and in eternity beyond (Revelation 4:1, 10-11).

Worshipping Christ takes nothing away from God the Father. It was the Father who commanded the angels to worship the Son in Hebrews 1:6, and it was the Father who was honored by the worship of Christ in Matthew 2:1-12.

Some, according to Matthew 2, chose not to worship Christ on the occasion of His birth. The king, priests, and scribes all had their chance, but they failed to do so. Consequently, their lives were never changed from a focus on self-worship and sin, and they died in spiritual dullness to reap the penalty of sin.

The wise men, however, did choose to worship Christ, and they experienced fulfillment and joy. As symbolized by returning to *"their own country another way"* (Matthew 2:12), which was also directed by God, they went home with new and better lives.

That's what worshipping God the Son did for the wise men, and that's what worshipping Jesus will do for us. Seek Him, and you will find Him. Worship Him, and you will experience dramatic changes that will vastly improve every aspect of your life.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Genuine Worship

John 4:10, 13-14, 19-26, 39-42

The story found in John 4 is a salvation story. Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, the Jewish Pharisee, about salvation in John 3, and then to the Samaritan woman about being saved in John 4. The two were vastly different people; one was a Jewish man of the upper class, and the other a Samaritan woman of a lower class. And they were also in two vastly different places; one was in Judea, and the other was in Samaria. Their need, however, was identical. Both of them needed to be saved, and that's why Jesus witnessed to Nicodemus in John 3:16 (See "Saved by Love" on page 34) and to the Samaritan woman in John 4:10, 13-14.

The story recorded in John 4 is also a worship story, as all true salvation stories become, at some point, worship stories (John 4:23). It is one that separates real worship from ritual worship, and one in which Jesus reveals three requirements for worship. It is God's prescription for worship in its purest and simplest form, and it is, therefore, an excellent worship guide.

Genuine Worship Requires a Salvation Experience

Jesus, unlike other full-blooded Jewish people, did not consider the Samaritan woman to be an outcast (John 4:9). His love for people was too great for that to happen. But neither did His love for the woman allow Him to ignore her sins (John 4:15-18). That would not have

The Heart of the Lesson

Christ is the focal point in worship. Worship in spirit and truth recognizing Jesus as your Savior and Lord.

been to her advantage. Instead, in beautiful symbolic language as the woman stood by the well, Jesus offered her the gift of salvation. *"Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.... Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life"* (John 4:10, 13-14).

The Samaritan woman, as a typical lost person, wanted to debate religion instead of hearing the plan of salvation. The Samaritans worshipped on Mount Gerizim while the Jews worshipped on Mount Zion. Both parties thought they were right, and the woman was ready to settle the issue with Jesus on the spot. Jesus, however, refused to debate and went right to the heart of the matter instead. The issue wasn't whether she was a Samaritan or a Jew or whether she worshipped on Mount Gerizim or Mount Zion. The point was that she needed to be saved! That was the issue, and it was also a prerequisite for genuine worship (John 4:22).

Genuine Worship Requires a Meeting of Our Spirit With God

After sharing the Good News of salvation with the woman, which she apparently accepted (John 4:28-29), Jesus went on to give her a quick and simple lesson on Christian worship. He said in John 4:23-24, *"The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*

That is to say that God is not confined to a mountain, not to Gerizim or Zion. Nor is He confined to images, sculptures, or paintings. God can be worshipped on a mountain, but He can also be worshipped in all other places on earth and beyond. For worship is not in buildings, places, or statues. Worship is not in rites, rituals, or traditions. Worship is not in sacrifices or offerings. Worship is not in feast days or fast days. Worship is not in circumcisions or sabbaths. Worship is not in forms or ceremonies. Instead, worship is in communing with God, and that first requires a relationship with Him that comes through salvation in Christ, and it also involves our spirits.

God is a Spirit, and real worship occurs when the spirit of a believer meets in humble reverence with God as a Spirit. That's why worship is called a *spiritual* experience! With our bodies we are world conscious, with our souls we are self-conscious, and with our spirits

we are God conscious. And that's why Jesus said that we *"must worship him in spirit."*

Genuine Worship Requires Christ-Centered Worship

The truth of John 4:23-24 is the truth of John 14:6. *"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."*

Therefore, when Jesus said that believers must worship *"in truth,"* He was referring to Himself. Jesus is the only way to the Father in salvation (Acts 4:12), and He is also the only way to the Father in worship (John 4:23-24). For He is the Truth Whom Christians worship today.

So believers don't exalt worship itself. That is, we don't worship the music or musicians of worship, or the preaching or preachers of worship, or the fellowship or fellows of worship, or the place or day or format of worship. We worship Christ, and God the Father is thereby exalted!

This new teaching would dramatically change the thinking and worship patterns of the woman. She was accustomed to a pagan style of worship in which the Samaritans typically practiced superstitions that purposefully excluded Jehovah God (2 Kings 17:28-29) and were, therefore, totally contrary to the worship taught by Jesus. Her Samaritan forefathers taught her to subtly omit God from worship and to welcome her personal preferences and vices into worship, while Jesus taught her to make God the focal point. That is, Jesus taught her to make worship Christ-centered. If her worship was going to truly honor the Father, it had to be centered on the Son!

"The Father seeketh such to worship him," said Jesus in John 4:23. Are you ready to answer that call, and to worship God *"in spirit and in truth"*? If you haven't already, trust Christ as your Savior today. He is the only way to God the Father and to eternal life (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Then make a firm commitment to worship God, as all true salvation stories essentially and eventually become worship stories. Worship Christ at church this Sunday, and in your daily walk as well.

Saved by Love

Jesus was an evangelist.

Before zealously proclaiming the gospel to the Samaritan woman in John 4, Jesus shared the dynamic words of John 3:16 with the Jewish leader Nicodemus. *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

John 3:16 is absolute truth. It's not partially true nor virtually true, but perfectly true. It's the greatest truth which Jesus has to offer — God loves you and deeply desires to give you the gift of eternal life.

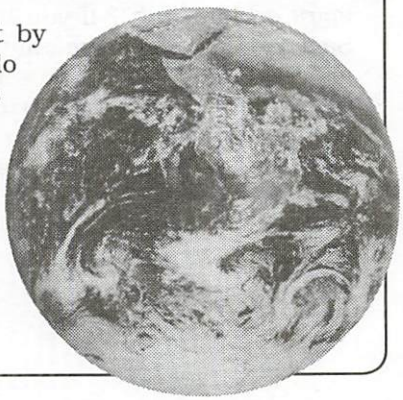
The depth of God's love is seen in the words *"that he gave his only begotten Son."* Jesus was God's one and only Son, and He was definitely one of a kind. Yet God, knowing the ugliness of our sins and that Jesus would be rejected and meanly crucified, graciously and proactively sent Him to die for our sins (Romans 3:23; 6:23). That's His priceless gift to us (Romans 8:32), and it indicates the depth of God's affection for humanity.

The width of God's love is seen in the words *world* and *whosoever believeth.* God's love reaches all people, not just one person or group. He wants everyone to be saved (2 Peter 3:9), and everyone can be saved because salvation is based on belief. If people had to purchase salvation, no one could afford it; and if salvation had to be earned, no one could obtain it. But everyone can believe, and everyone should believe.

The height of God's love is seen in the words *"should not perish, but have everlasting life."* That's good news! Bound and certain to perish, but due to God's love gift eternal life is received instead. What a marvelous change of circumstances. What good fortune. What love!

Have you accepted this love gift by faith, or rejected it? You've got to do one of the two. Receive Jesus as your personal Savior, and you'll become one of the spiritual children of God.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).



Spontaneous Worship

Matthew 14:32-33

Solomon's words, *"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven"* (Ecclesiastes 3:1), would surely apply to organized and spontaneous worship. Believers need a designated time, place, order, and assembly for organized worship. God clearly indicated His preference for corporate worship in verses like Hebrews 10:25 and with instructions for worship structures like the tabernacle and temple. The church, as will be noted in lesson 12, is also an assembly for organized and corporate worship.

But there is also a time, place, and occasion for spontaneous worship by an individual, family, or small group, and that is the focus of this lesson. Spontaneous worship is certainly not a substitute for organized worship, nor does the worship of an individual suffice for group worship. For that matter, if the worshipper does not see the need for organized worship as prescribed and blessed by God, it is doubtful that he will truly see the need for any other form of worship. The fact remains, however, that the Bible contains many accounts of a person or persons worshipping God without the aid of a set time or place, and Matthew 14:32-33 is one such case.

Storm at Sea

Dangers and needs have a tendency to arise suddenly. That was the case for the apostles in Matthew 14:22-31. They had just witnessed the miraculous feeding of the five thousand (Matthew 14:14-21), so their faith should have been at an all-time high. However, when the

The Heart of the Lesson

The apostles worshipped Christ spontaneously. Worship whenever and wherever the need and opportunity arises.

storm unexpectedly struck on the Sea of Galilee, their first response was to worry instead of worship. They were perfectly within God's will by being in *"a ship"* (Matthew 14:22) and on the sea; so they really had no reason to be *"afraid"* (Matthew 14:27, 30). But afraid they were, and Jesus said that it was a case of too *"little faith"* (Matthew 14:31).

We can connect with the apostles. We've probably been there before. At the moment we have every reason to worship, we worry instead. Unlike the man who spontaneously worshipped Christ at his darkest moment in Matthew 9:18 or the woman who did the same in Matthew 15:25, we wait until the storm is over to praise and uplift God and needlessly bring *"fear"* (Matthew 14:26) upon ourselves.

The point of the story is to worship during the storm when the difficulties, dangers, and needs are the greatest. Learn to worship sooner rather than later, and you will not be so apt to drown in the fears and worries of life.

Worship at Sea

Jesus stilled the storm, and the worship service began. It could have happened earlier, but at least it was genuine when it did get underway according to Matthew 14:32-33. *"When they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God."*

Their worship was as spontaneous as the storm and as sincere, significant, and enriching as any of the planned times of worship. It commenced and concluded quickly, yet it was no less worship and an honor to God.

They humbly worshipped Jesus because He had so miraculously and graciously delivered them from their perils at sea and because, in the incident, they had rapidly grown in respect for the person and power of Jesus. After stilling the first storm at sea the apostles said of Jesus, *"What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!"* (Matthew 8:27), but after this storm they emphatically proclaimed, *"Of a truth thou art the Son of God"* (Matthew 14:33).

That's worship! Impulsive or premeditated, spontaneous or planned, when God's people humbly direct awe, adoration, and appreciation to Him, that's worship. When God's people, individually or collectively, acknowledge that Christ is God and that He is the almighty One and worthy of praise and trust, that's worship. What the apostles did in Matthew 14:33 without forethought and before bringing their boat to ground or drying their clothes was to gratefully exalt God the Son in a way that was pleasing to God the Father, and that was worship.

The apostles of the New Testament did not have a patent on spon-

taneous worship. David, for example, was often given to this style of lifting God up in praise. From a lonely shepherd boy in his father's fields to Israel's king upon an exalted throne, David is seen time and again in the Old Testament worshipping God individually and instantaneously. One such case is in Psalm 18:1-3 when David had been fully delivered from the threatening hand of King Saul, and he said to God in worship, *"I will love thee, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies."*

David didn't worry, he worshipped!

If a fellow church member were to drop out of the services and begin to neglect corporate worship, we would rightfully grow concerned for the individual and encourage him to return. Yet we might miss a dozen opportunities per day to impulsively lift up God in Christian praise and not think a thing about it. That's sad for it results in many missed opportunities to witness and to be blessed.

Personal worship services don't have to be long, just sincere. Elaborate planning and detail is not necessary, but a keen awareness of God's presence and goodness and a humble willingness to acknowledge Him is necessary. Certainly we shouldn't neglect our opportunities of corporate worship with our church family because that's where we get the spiritual fuel to worship spontaneously, individually, and with our families and small groups. But neither do we need to think that worship is only for Sunday morning at eleven o'clock. Worship is for every day and for each occasion that God gives us an opportunity to praise Christ by saying, *"Of a truth thou art the Son of God."*

Home Worship

Luke 10:38-42

Jesus was often invited into homes, and He gladly accepted the invitations. This week's lesson text is taken from the Gospel According to Luke, and there are at least five such accounts in Luke's Gospel alone. In addition to His visit in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus which we will study, Jesus visited in the home of a Pharisee in Luke 7:36 where He ate and ministered to sinners, and in the home of another Pharisee in Luke 14:1 where He ate, healed a sick man, and taught the Scriptures. Jesus also visited in the home of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10 to offer Zacchaeus the gift of salvation and to fellowship with him, and in Luke 24:29, after His resurrection, Jesus went home with the two Emmaus disciples to rest, eat, pray, and share God's truth. So it is evident according to the Scriptures that Jesus loved to mix spiritual matters with home life.

Luke 10:38-42 isn't the only Bible text which mentions Jesus in the Bethany home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. He also paid visits in John 11:1-57 and John 12:1-11, and most likely there were other visits which are not recorded. Why did Jesus drop in so often on this particular family? First, Bethany was only a short distance from Jerusalem, and their home was a convenient place for Jesus and the apostles to stop, eat, rest, and fellowship. Second, they were always welcome in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus as verse 38 of the text indicates. Apparently they were a family of means, and, more importantly, a family who warmly greeted house guests. But the third and greatest reason that Jesus enjoyed visiting in their home is the same reason that He enjoys meeting in your home through God's Word and His Holy Spirit, and that's because of His great love for

The Heart of the Lesson

Mary of Bethany welcomed Jesus into her home and worshipped Him. Worship as a family in your home.

people and the family. Notice in the reading of John 11:1, 3-5, as Jesus prepared to go to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead, what so strongly prompted Him to make the visit. It was love and also a desire to bring glory to God.

"Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.... Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."

Now we will see how this wholesome love relationship turned into a home worship service in Luke 10:38-42.

Martha was Occupied With Her Duties

Martha had the gift of service. She excelled as a hostess preparing foods and a place for her guests to lodge. She also, as the apparent first-born of the family, had a lion-like personality which she did not hesitate to use on Mary, as she is seen in Luke 10:40 implying that her sister was irresponsible and maybe even a little immature and lazy for not helping her with preparations. *"Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me."*

Martha was not a bad person. She was the one who graciously welcomed Jesus and His followers, at least a dozen of them, into her home. Jesus, however, begged to lovingly disagree with her on the issue of serving at that particular moment. He certainly loved Martha according to John 11:5, and He tenderly said *"Martha, Martha"* in Luke 10:41, but the greater need of the occasion, as Jesus saw it, was worship, not service. *"Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her"* (Luke 10:41-42).

Jesus was on His way to the cross, and an elaborate meal was not His greatest need. He preferred something of greater value with more lasting affect. There was certainly a time and place to prepare a nice meal and eat it, but what he wanted at the moment was the loving and intimate touch of family worship, and He knew that the soon-to-be-grieved family of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus needed the same.

Believers need to be ministered to by Jesus in worship before we can effectively minister to and for Him. That is, what we do for Christ in service is extremely important, but what we do with Christ and what He does in, for, and through us in worship is more important! Consequently, we must learn to worship and serve Him first and in

His way, and not according to our own terms. For worship, whether in church or at home, is the priority over service.

Mary was Occupied With Worship

While Martha was preoccupied and over-occupied with serving Christ, Mary was occupied with worshipping Him. The worship got underway in Luke 10:39, and was commended by Christ in 10:42. *"She had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.... But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."*

Mary was always found at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39; John 11:32; 12:3), which was definitely a position of worship. There she showed humility and submission, and indicated that she had a spiritual need which only Jesus could fill. Her worship of Jesus was not in the temple with the masses, but in the quietness of her home. It was not planned or complex, yet the worship helped Jesus to conquer the difficulties of the passion week, and prepared Mary to cope with the crucifixion which was only days away.

At the feet of Jesus in worship Mary found solace and supply, as did many others in the New Testament. A multitude of sick and desperately needy people found healing at the feet of Jesus in Matthew 15:30. Jairus was found humbly at the feet of Jesus on behalf of his twelve-year-old daughter who was sick unto death in Mark 5:22, and later Jesus restored her life. A mother was found at the feet of Jesus beseeching Him on behalf of her demon-possessed daughter in Mark 7:25, and Jesus kindly responded to her by casting out the demon. A sinful woman was found at the feet of Jesus weeping and seeking forgiveness in Luke 7:37-38, and Jesus forgave her. A man from whom Jesus had cast out demons was found at peace at the feet of Jesus in Luke 8:35. And John found himself worshipping at the feet of Jesus in Revelation 1:17 and was told not to fear. A lot of people, including Mary of Bethany, found a lot of good things while worshipping at the feet of Jesus, and we can do the same.

Worship is too important to be a Sunday morning, once-a-week experience. Adding Sunday night and a midweek service helps, but that too is insufficient. We need more! We need the frequency and intimacy of praising God which only home worship can provide. Like the spontaneous worship of lesson 10, home worship is not meant to be a substitute for organized worship with our church family, but it does supplement corporate worship in a way that God is honored and families are strengthened.

Home worship does not have to be carefully planned or orga-

nized. It does not have to extend over a long period of time. It does not have to involve a lot of features nor to be complex in its presentation. It requires no special dress, announcements, or offerings. No one has to preach a sermon or sing a special song. Home worship, like the worship of Mary, can be spontaneous, brief, quiet, relaxed, sweet, and intimate. It can be something as simple as the family gathering at the dining table to acknowledge a blessing given them by God before the supper prayer is spoken, or mentioning an attribute of God in casual family conversation, or reading a Scripture with your family at the beginning or close of a day. Home worship is, in essence, inviting God into your home and family life, acknowledging His divine presence, and praising Him on a day-to-day basis.

The family who worships God together, will then serve God together. That was the combination that worked for Joshua and his family, and it will work in our homes as well. *"If it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD"* (Joshua 24:15).

Welcome God into your home today and worship Him. Then depart to serve Him!

Church Worship

Acts 2:41-47; 5:42

Worship is the supreme ministry of the church. Consequently, there is no facet of church life that should be taken more seriously than worship. If the church falters at exalting God in Christian praise, it's doubtful that the church will take her beliefs or mission earnestly. Possibly that's why the Great Commission was given to the church (Matthew 28:18-20) in the setting of the church at worship (Matthew 28:17).

The church is one of five primary places of worship mentioned in the Bible. The worship of the Old Testament altar (lesson 1) focused on sin confession and repentance. The worship of the tabernacle focused on God's presence and guidance. The worship of the temple (lesson 6) focused on God's glory. The worship of the synagogue focused on God's Word, and the worship of the church focused on all of the above and on God at work in His church.

Our purpose is not to re-create the exact worship style of the altar, tabernacle, temple, or synagogue, but to learn from their worship. The music, for example, of the temple indicates that God is pleased by music in worship, and the emphasis placed on the study of the Scriptures in the synagogue sets a good example for us in teaching and preaching God's Word.

But the early church is our primary model for worship. God does not expect churches today to replace the Jerusalem church in history, nor is the contemporary church under a biblical mandate to duplicate the day of Pentecost and its worship in each small detail. However, while maintaining the uniqueness God has given to each

The Heart of the Lesson

The early church met regularly to worship. Worship on a regular basis with your church family.

local assembly, the twenty-first century church can model herself in worship after the first century church and know thereby that God is honored.

God's Church Meeting to Worship

There was no shortage of meetings in the Lord's first churches. The Jerusalem church, for example, met when they numbered 120 (Acts 1:15), 3000 (Acts 2:41), 5000 (Acts 4:4), and beyond (Acts 6:7). The early churches met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7) and on other days as well (Acts 2:46). They met en masse in places like the temple and in smaller groups in their homes (Acts 2:46). They also held church-style meetings at locations such as a riverside (Acts 16:13) and in a three-story building (Acts 20:6-12). They met in a spirit of *"gladness"* and with this motto: *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together"* (Hebrews 10:25).

The early churches also met with purpose. That is, they met to worship, and the text shows that their worship included the following features.

They held regular teaching sessions. *"They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine"* (Acts 2:42). *Stedfastly* means that they persisted in the study of God's Word and devoted themselves to it. The *"apostles' doctrine"* was the story of Christ which included His birth, life, ministry, teachings, crucifixion, resurrection, and promise to return. God's Word was central in their worship just as it was for the Israelites (lesson 7).

They enjoyed fellowship. *"They continued stedfastly in ... fellowship"* (Acts 2:42). Fellowship is a unique trait of the New Testament church at worship. The simplest definition of the word is "being together," and it reaches an elevated form in voluntarily having *"all things common"* (Acts 2:44-45).

Jesus taught His disciples that there was nothing more important than loving God (Matthew 22:36-38), and second in importance was loving people. *"The second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"* (Matthew 22:39).

That love is pro-active in word and deed, and there is no better occasion to express the love than before, during, and after Christian worship. That's why some churches begin their services with a call to worship which directly expresses love to God and then move to a fellowship song in which the members of the congregation greet one another in the love of Christ. That's a biblical form of worship taught by Jesus (Matthew 22:36-39) and practiced by the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:42, 44-45).

They observed the Lord's Supper. *"They continued stedfastly in ... breaking of bread"* (Acts 2:42). The Jerusalem church gave quality

time to studying the Scriptures and saved enough time to kindly acknowledge one another. But they never forgot that Jesus was their supreme focus. He was the Founder (Matthew 16:18) and Head (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23) of their church. Therefore, above all else, they remembered Jesus and used the Lord's Supper as a discipline to that end. Through the *"breaking of bread"* in worship, they regularly communed with Jesus, recalled His sacrifice for them, and anticipated His return.

Of all the services of the church, there are none more important than the Lord's Supper. It's one of our great worship privileges, and it deserves a high priority status whether it is observed weekly, monthly, quarterly, semiannually, or annually.

They conducted prayer meetings. *"They continued stedfastly in ... prayers"* (Acts 2:42). The church needed power to grow and multiply, and prayer connected them to God Who was the only real source of power. Without power the spiritual machinery of the church would have slowly ground to a halt. Therefore, in worship and at other times as well, they prayed to God. They prayed specifically about spiritual needs (Acts 1:14), when they were in trouble and needed deliverance (Acts 12:5), and as a common practice (Acts 16:13). Prayer was their lifestyle, and consequently it was a natural and major element in their worship. Thus the early church was equipped to meet the many demands of life and ministry.

Acts 2:42 is a beginning, not an end. It is an insightful verse, but it is not meant to be the only New Testament guide to worship. For example, according to Acts 2:47, they also held praise services in connection with their teaching sessions, fellowships, observances of the Lord's Supper, and prayer meetings. These five features were primary in their worship and were clearly used to the pleasure of God. Therefore, today's church can use this worship style with the assurance that they are connecting with God in a way that will bless God and His church.

God Working in His Church

In what kind of church does God work and make His presence known? The answer is found in the worshipping church of Acts 2:42, and the evidence is recorded in Acts 2:41, 43, 47. *"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.... And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.... Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."*

The church was busy in welcoming new converts into their assembly, and it was very evident that God's hand was upon the church.

His presence, power, and glory were obvious, and that made people want to join in the church's work and worship.

David felt the same way in Psalm 26:8. He wasn't overly impressed by the building or the abilities of worship leaders and participants, but by the awesomeness of God's presence in worship, and that's why he had a deep desire to attend the services. He said in the verse, *"LORD, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth."*

So it is with people today. A fabulous and comfortable building can carry a church only so far. Great preaching and singing is necessary and good, but something more is needed. It is the undeniable presence of God. It is, as we say, "the moving of the Holy Spirit" in the worship service. That will cause people to come to church for the right purpose and compel them to come back again and again. Praise God in worship, and He will inhabit the praise (Psalm 22:3). When God is unmistakably present in such a positive and powerful way, people will want to be present as well.

An observable transformation was taking place so strongly in the lives of Christ's first followers that even the non-believing community took notice and was favorable to it (Acts 2:47). That was one of the secrets to their success in reaching so many converts. The community saw the church worshipping God, and they knew that something real was taking place in their lives individually and in the church collectively, and many of them simply wanted to be a part of it. The church's worship was loosely organized at this stage in her infancy, but it was working. It was working to God's glory, to the spiritual vitality of the church, as a witness to the community, and it continued to work beyond the day of Pentecost. *"Daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ"* (Acts 5:42). May God give this worship experience to His churches today!

In worship we need to focus on sin confession as did Abraham and others at the altar. In worship we need to connect with the presence and guidance of God as did Moses and others in the tabernacle. In worship we need to see and appreciate God's glory as did Solomon and others in the temple. In worship we need to make God's Word central as did Jesus and others in the synagogues. And in worship we certainly need to link with God at work in our church.

Pray that God will work in your church, and trust and believe that He will. Allow God to do the work by depending less on human ability and more on divine ability. Worship Him regularly and reverently. That is, let *"fear"* come *"upon every soul"* (Acts 2:43) as you exalt Him in Christian praise, and He will do a mighty work in your church!

Heavenly Worship

Revelation 5:8-14

The enemies of Christ were totally convinced that He was worthy of death. *"He ought to die,"* they cried out in John 19:7. But the worshippers in John's vision felt much different. They believed, and will so throughout eternity, that Jesus was and is worthy of every word and gesture of worship that could possibly be given to Him.

In Revelation 4 Jesus is worshipped in heaven because of His amazing work in creation. *"After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.... Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created"* (Revelation 4:1, 11).

In Revelation 5 Jesus is worshipped in heaven because of His gracious work in redemption. A portion of the chapter, with the aid of three questions, will be considered in this lesson. Regretfully, the worship services in Revelation 7:11; 11:16-19; 14:3; 19:1-6 can only be noted as good background reading and as confirmation that Jesus truly is worthy of being exalted.

Who Worshipped in John's Vision?

The answers to the first question are found in Revelation 5:8, 10-11, 13.

The *"four beasts"* are cherubim (Ezekiel 10), a special order of an-

The Heart of the Lesson

The host of heaven fulfills their greatest purpose by worshipping Jesus. Worship now as you will in heaven by acknowledging the eternal worthiness of Christ to be exalted.

gelic beings which represent the purposes of God in creation.

The *"four and twenty elders"* represent all the saints. Notice that they all play harps (Revelation 5:8) which signals a celebration of victory. Notice also that they are all kings (Revelation 5:10), which explains why Jesus is known as the *"KING OF KINGS"* in Revelation 19:16, and whose reign is described in Revelation 21-22. The believers are not merely subjects of the kingdom, but reigning with the King! And finally notice that they are all priests (Revelation 5:10), which indicates that they speak directly to Jesus.

The *"angels"* (Revelation 5:11) were also present, and together with the saints they make up an innumerable host, for ten thousand was the highest number the Greek language could express and explains why the verse concludes with the words *"ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands."* God knows the exact number, but John didn't have ability or words to express it!

So the scene in John's vision is that all of God's created order will triumphantly worship Jesus as summarized in Revelation 5:13. *"Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."*

Who Was Worshipped in John's Vision?

Jesus as the Lamb Who was slain was worshipped! He was and is *"the Lamb"* of Revelation 5:8, the *"Worthy ... Lamb"* of Revelation 5:12, and *"the Lamb"* Who sits *"upon the throne"* royally and eternally in Revelation 5:13.

Jesus, however, was also worshipped as the *"Lion"* (Revelation 5:5). As a Lamb Jesus was meek, gentle, and lowly; as a Lion He was soon to open the seven seal judgments, the seven trumpet judgments, and the seven bowl judgments. *"Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof"* says Revelation 5:9.

As a Lamb Who sacrificially provides redemption, or as a Lion Who exacts God's judgment against unbelief and sin, Jesus is worthy of worship, now and forever.

How Was the Worship Expressed in John's Vision?

There are five answers.

Jesus was not worshipped in a casual manner. Revelation 5:8 says that they *"fell down"* and worshipped Him. That's a very distinct posture of worship. It was immediate, and it indicated an unquestionable respect for Jesus. In no uncertain terms did they signify that

Jesus was superior and absolutely worthy of worship.

The action of the heavenly worshippers teaches today's worshippers to connect with Jesus at the point the worship service begins, not at some point in the worship. Furthermore, just as we would respect the flag in a patriotic service or a judge in a courtroom, we should always give Jesus all the reverence due to Him.

Their worship of Jesus was sweet. It was as *"golden vials full of odours"* (Revelation 5:8) before God, which means that Christ-exalting worship rises to God as a sweet smell. Worship is fragrant to God!

Their worship included prayer. *"Which are the prayers of saints"* (Revelation 5:8). Finally and fully the prayers of Matthew 6:10 will be answered: *"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."*

They worshipped Christ through music. *"They sung a new song"* according to Revelation 5:9, and the song was about being redeemed by the *"blood"* of the Lamb. Therefore, we shouldn't be afraid to sing a new song in worship today, nor an old song about the blood.

They acknowledged the worthiness of Christ. The worshippers attributed seven (the Bible number for perfection) qualities to Him. *"Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing"* (Revelation 5:12).

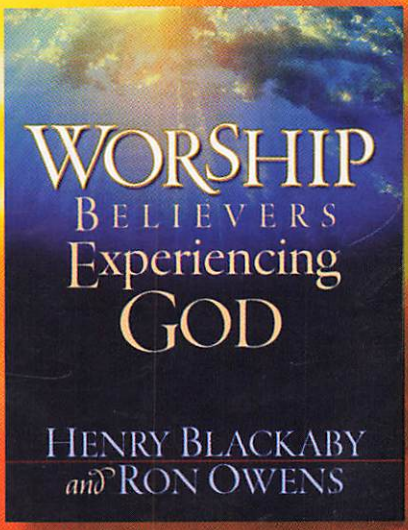
The word *"blessing"* in Revelation 5:12 is associated with the word *eulogy* which means "to speak well of." That's worship in its purest, simplest and yet greatest form. Speaking well of God as an act of worship is what the world is inevitably and irretrievably moving toward according to the worship prophecy of Revelation 5:8-14, and the quicker and greater it happens in our lives today, the better!

David blessed the Lord in days of old. *"Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits"* (Psalm 103:1-2). And we can do the same today. We don't have to wait for eternity according to Philippians 2:9-11. *"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

Worship by the example of our godly forefathers in the Old Testament (lessons 1-7). Worship as did the saints of the New Testament (lessons 8-12), and worship today while anticipating even a greater time of worship in eternity (lesson 13). Worship at church. Worship at home, and worship when it's just God and you. Worship regularly; worship spontaneously. Worship God the Son to the glory of God the Father. And worship, not according to your personal preferences, but according to the prescriptions which God has given us.

What Does God Desire in Our Worship?

All believers can benefit from learning what it is about worship that really matters to God. This resource is an invaluable tool for pastors and worship leaders, especially when questions arise over different worship styles. Designed for study either individually or in a small group, this resource can help guide your church to remember the true and proper focus of worship.



Worship: Believers Experiencing God by Henry Blackaby and Ron Owens is available through Pathway Christian Store.

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